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Capacity building for occupational therapy in Vietnam: an India-Vietnam collaboration for knowledge transfer to support contextually relevant occupational therapy education and practice

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Introduction: Currently, occupational therapy services in Vietnam are provided by international volunteers or rehabilitation workers in select areas. There is an urgent need for commencing occupational therapy education in Vietnam to ensure sustainable services.

Objective: The five-year India-Vietnam collaboration aims to support contextually relevant occupational therapy education and practice in Vietnam.

Methods: MCNV, a well-known NGO in Vietnam invited an Indian university to conduct a 10-day-long needs-assessment survey across hospitals and universities in Vietnam. This was followed by identifying stakeholders, developing liaisons, exchange of faculty, sharing of knowledge, understanding the teaching and practice context and curriculum development.

Results: The survey identified challenges such as limited awareness of occupational therapy, inadequate English language proficiency, dominance of the medical model in the health-care system and lack of legislative support for the program. The survey findings were communicated to stakeholders from the government, funding agencies, universities and rehabilitation hospitals during a workshop to solicit their support. The workshop concluded with strategies to address the challenges and commence the undergraduate program at two Vietnamese universities. Subsequently, alongside training of prospective Vietnamese educators for the program at the Indian university, collaborators from Vietnam and India are developing the curriculum and competency standards, while ensuring relevance to the Vietnamese education system, linguistic, cultural and practice context.

Conclusion: As occupational therapy continues to expand in developing countries, this project serves as a model to develop contextually relevant education programs that suitably position the profession to address health needs in today's diverse and challenging socio-political-economic environments.